Claims

We claim:

1. A method for providing an online auction platform, the method comprising:

   accessing a list of items being auctioned among a first group of members;

   generating a request from a first member, the request including one of the items and a bidding price, wherein the first member is one of the members; and

   receiving a response from an owner of one of the items.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the first group of members is formed by identifying each other with one or more of: (i) similar information resources, (ii) similar interests, (iii) pre-existing relationships, and (iv) common characteristics.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the first group of members is formed as a result of the members (i) indicating a desire to join the first group, (ii) being invited to join the first group, or (iii) discovering common characteristics among each other.

4. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

   joining in the first group by contacting one of the members in the first group.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein the contacting one of the members includes:

   sending a message the one of the members, the message including identity information and characteristics information having affinity with the first group.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein the owner is one of the members and wherein the owner determines if the bidding price is acceptable after comparing the bidding price with other offers, if there are any.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the response includes one of: (i) the bidding price is accepted, and (ii): a higher bidding price has arrived.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the accessing a list of items being auctioned includes:

    executing an application to retrieve the list of items being auctioned, and

    displaying the list of items in a display application.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein the application sends out respective retrieval requests, each to one of the members to collect the items being auctioned among the first group using a directory access protocol over a network.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein the directory access protocol is one of (i) Lightweight Device Access Protocol, (ii) DBMS protocol, or (iii) other filesharing protocol such as Napster, Gnutella, HTTP, and an extension therof.

11. The method of claim 9 wherein the network is selected from a group consisting of (i) the Internet, (ii) the Intranet, (iii) a wireless network, and (iv) a combined public and private network.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein the owner is one of a second group of members, wherein the first and second groups do not necessarily have anything in common and wherein one of the first group of members is one of the second group of members, as a gateway member.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein the request is passed to the second group of members via the gateway member.

14. The method of claim 13 further comprising updating the list of items to include any items being auctioned in the second group of members.

15. A method for providing an online auction platform, the method comprising:
    accessing a list of items being auctioned among a group of members;
    adding an item to the list for auction;
    sending out the list so that the members in the group receive the updated list;
    receiving a bidding price for the item from one of the group of members; and
    generating a response to the request once a decision to the bidding price is made.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the accessing a list of items includes:
    generating respective retrieval requests, each to one of the members to collect auction content information using a directory access protocol over a network.

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17. The method of claim 16 wherein the directory access protocol is one of (i) Lightweight Device Access Protocol, (ii) DBMS protocol or (iii) other filesharing protocol such as Napster, Gnutella, HTTP, and an extension thereof.

18. The method of claim 16 wherein the network is selected from a group consisting of (i) the Internet, (ii) the Intranet, (iii) a wireless network, and (iv) a combined public and private network.

19. The method of claim 15, wherein the generating a response to the request comprises:
    keeping receiving multiple bidding prices respectively from some of the members, the bidding price being one of the multiple bidding prices;
    ordering the multiple bidding prices; and
    generating the response when one of the multiple bidding prices is selected.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the response is an acceptance of the bidding price.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein the response includes a higher bidding price from another member in the group.

22. The method of claim 15, wherein the members are from a first and a second community, one of the members, as a gateway member, belongs commonly to the first and second communities.

23. The method of claim 16 wherein each of the first and second communities is respectfully formed by identifying each other member therein with one or more of: (i) similar information

resources, (ii) similar interests, (iii) pre-existing relationships, and (iv) common characteristics.

24. The method of claim 16 wherein each of the first and second communities is respectfully formed as a result of the members (i) indicating a desire to join one or both of the two communities, (ii) being invited to join one or both of the two communities, or (iii) discovering common characteristics among each other member.

25. A system for providing an online auction platform, the system comprising:

a memory means for storing program code for generating requests associated with an online auction using a file access protocol, access rights associated with a first virtual community, device program applications and a plurality of user files;

a user interface including a character input interface, a pointing device and a display; and

processing means connected to the memory means and the user interface and responsive to an input provided by a user to generate requests for content relating to an item being auctioned using a file transfer protocol, forward the request through a communications network to a second terminal device, process responses received from the second terminal device containing the requested content relating to the item.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein the directory access protocol is one of (i) Lightweight Device Access Protocol, (ii) DBMS protocol or (iii) other filesharing protocol such as Napster, Gnutella, HTTP, and an extension thereof.

27. The system of claim 25, wherein the communications network includes one or more of a network and a wireless communications network.

28. The system of claim 25, wherein the program code is an executed version of an application selected from a group consisting of a browser application, an email application, an instant messaging application, a net meeting application and a network game interface.